UNITED NATIONS

# World Chronicle

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**GUEST:** **Ismat KITTANI**
**Special Advisor to the United Nations Secretary-General**

**JOURNALISTS:** Paul Lewis, *The New York Times*
Norberto Svarzman, Televisa

**MODERATOR:** Michael Littlejohns

## THE UNITED NATIONS AND WORLD AFFAIRS

Ismat Kittani, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, elaborates on a number of important international issues. The world is moving towards a more peaceful era. Many controversial items are disappearing from the agenda of the United Nations General Assembly. United Nations shortcomings in Somalia are due to the failure of the world community in disarming the different Somali factions. Mr. Kittani predicts that within a few years the political, economic and social map of the Middle East will be different. The World Summit for Social Development is a unique opportunity for the North and South to work together to achieve sustainable economic and social development.

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**ANNOUNCER:** From United Nations Headquarters in New York, this is **World Chronicle**, an unedited interview programme about major global issues. Here now to introduce our guest is the host of today's **World Chronicle**.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** I'm Michael Littlejohns, and this is **World Chronicle**. There is no doubt that the end of the cold war has done little to solve the world's problems. Wars between and within nations and states continue to threaten international peace and security. Meanwhile, finding solutions for other international economic, social and environmental problems has demanded more global attention and cooperation. How is the world community responding to these issues? And how is the United Nations dealing with these realities?

Our guest today is in a unique position to assess the new role of the World Organization. He is Ismat Kittani, Special Adviser to the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Joining me to talk with Mr. Kittani are Paul Lewis of *The New York Times* and Norberto Svarzman of Televisa. Mr. Kittani, welcome to World Chronicle.

**KITTANI:** Thank you.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Mr. Ambassador -- I address you as Ambassador because you were formerly the Ambassador of Iraq -- during the period of the cold war, that phenomenon was widely blamed for the failures of the United Nations and the fact that it had been so ineffectual in a lot of areas. The end of the cold war was supposed to herald a new era for the Organization, making it able to do the things that it had been unable to do in the past, in part because of the exercise of the veto and the East-West confrontation, et cetera, et cetera. In fact, things don't seem to have changed very much. Why is that?

**KITTANI:** Well, I think, Michael, I think the world is changing and a new era is coming. The question is it will take time to move from the old to the new. And it's not just that the cold war has ended, as you just mentioned; I mean, everybody talks the cold war has ended, the cold war.... But if you are looking at the world from this building, from this house, as they call it, some of the most controversial issues of the agenda of the [General] Assembly, for example, are disappearing one by one. We used to spend half of the [General] Assembly arguing about apartheid, about Namibia, about the Middle East, the question of Palestine. I think the world is moving to a more cohesive and a less confrontational, certainly on the political side. Now, you can argue that all these things were connected with the cold war, or they may have a thread to the cold war, but I think it is a move in the right direction. The question is whether you're talking about the international community or about the United Nations. We are in a

jelling stage of trying to find out. Well, we're ending a century, we're ending a millennium, in five years we're going to have two new ones, and we cannot simply go on with the same slogans, with the same positions, with the same arguments, even with the same papers we used to prepare here if we're going to gear ourselves to the 21st century, and to the third millennium, I suppose.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Mr. Kittani, you have undertaken a number of missions to component parts of the former Soviet Union. What's your impression about the situation in that part of the world? It seems to be pretty difficult there.

**KITTANI:** I presume you are talking about the job as the Secretary-General's special envoy to Tajikistan. In that connection, last summer and fall, I did --

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Did you go to Azerbaijan, didn't you go there?

**KITTANI:** No. Nothing on the Caucasian side, but what we call Central Asia.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Yes.

**KITTANI:** I toured all that area, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and of course I had to go to Afghanistan also, because of the border. I must say that immediately now, if you're talking about now and the immediate future, things are not going so well. The situation inside Tajikistan is not as propitious as we had hoped. As you know, my successor, Ambassador Piriz-Ballon of Uruguay, as the envoy of the Secretary-General, had two rounds of talks, one in Moscow, one in Teheran, bringing together the government and the armed opposition, which is mostly -- the leaders are outside Tajikistan, and we hope very much that we can put those negotiations back on track. The third round is supposed to be in Islamabad, but the time has not yet been fixed.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** So is this another failure for the UN? I mean --

**KITTANI:** No, no. Here -- first of all, the UN is not involved to that extent. It was an initiative of the Secretary-General. We have a very small observer mission there which coordinates the humanitarian and other activities. He appointed a special envoy, who, as I said, tried to see if national reconciliation could be done. And this is only in Tajikistan.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** So sort of good offices.

**KITTANI:** Yes. Yes.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Paul Lewis?

**LEWIS:** Could we switch to Somalia? Because you were the mediator there. It seems that Somalia is going to go down as a failure or a quasi-failure for the United Nations. It seems to be extraordinarily difficult to get a settlement there. And I'm

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wondering if you have any explanation for this, or if now with the wisdom of hindsight you can see any sort of mistakes or errors that we've made in our handling of Somalia.

KITTANI: Well, I think -- first of all, I'm not -- I wasn't a mediator, I was the Special Representative of the Secretary-General --

LEWIS: Yes, but it amounts to the same thing.

KITTANI: You can call me that. The point here I want to make is a lot of things have gone wrong. And there is enough blame to go around. But if I were to pick probably one outstanding lost opportunity, I would certainly, above everything else, [pick] the failure to disarm the warring factions when we had the mandate and we had the means to do it. That would have been between December and March, December 1992 and March 1993. That was the period I was in....

LEWIS: Right.

KITTANI: Just a little over four months. You remember the controversy, that the Security Council had set up UNITAF?

LEWIS: Yes.

KITTANI: And the mandate was to create, quote, "a secure environment for....

LEWIS: Yes, and to disarm.

KITTANI: And the controversy, which went public, between the Secretary-General and the then US administration, whether this included --

LEWIS: A disarmament.

KITTANI: -- disarming or not, and I think if the Secretary-General's advice had been followed, and if -- and I think if there had been a swift and effective disarming, the whole story in Somalia would have been different.

LITTLEJOHNS: Are you talking about the period after President Bush sent in the American troops?

KITTANI: Yes.

LITTLEJOHNS: Because at that time the Secretary-General urged the President of the United States to disarm.

KITTANI: That's right.

LITTLEJOHNS: And he refused, right?

LEWIS: Because the American Congress refused all the way along. You know.

KITTANI: No, but there was this difference of opinion, the Secretary-General saying you cannot do anything without disarming the factions. And indeed, in subsequent reports to the Security Council he made it very clear that disarming the factions is a prerequisite for reconciliation and economic and social reconstruction. So I pick that as probably one of the biggest lost opportunities.

**LEWIS:** And what about the decision to hunt for General Aidid and to turn this into a personal quarrel against Aidid?

**KITTANI:** I had left long before that, so I really am not in a position to shed any more light on that.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Your predecessor in Somalia, Ambassador Mohammad Sahnoun of Algeria, has come out with a rather strong criticism of the Secretary-General, blaming him largely for the failure in Somalia. So you would say that that's unfair, because the Secretary-General in fact proposed doing things which the United States in particular was unwilling to do.

**KITTANI:** Well, about the period before I arrived in Somalia to replace my good friend, Mohammad Sahnoun -- and I arrived on the eighth of November, 1992, I cannot speak about the previous -- but what I found in Somalia, certainly, I found the situation in a shambles. It was a mess. There were only 500 UN troops from Pakistan. They had arrived two months before. They were supposed to secure the airport and the seaport, and to escort the food supplies. They had done none of this. They were prevented from deployment. They were holed up on the sand dunes where they had landed. The airport was closed. A fraction at best of the enormous supplies that had been donated so generously to Somalia, a fraction of it -- because of banditry, because of bribes, because of extortion, because of all kinds of things -- was reaching the people. And there was no political reconciliation. So, and just by contrast, I -- and you know me, I don't like to talk about myself, but when I left, thanks to what the Security Council had done, the backbone of the famine had been broken. And this was mainly because of the close cooperation between UNITAF, you know, the American-led and controlled operation, and UNISOM I in coordinating the deployment of their troops with the movement of food. We had already started the political reconciliation. You remember, Paul, you came on the fourth of January.

**LEWIS:** Yes.

**KITTANI:** Which was something we hadn't expected at all. The Security Council opened the conference, they decided to disarm the faction leaders, they decided to have another conference in March, which led to far-reaching political.... Back to my thing, as long as they were not disarmed, as they themselves said they would disarm, it's very difficult to -- things developed in a completely different ....

**SVARZMAN:** Going to another problem closer to us here in New York City, the question of Haiti. Every effort done so far points to failure. Now they're speaking about the use of force, which we are -- a very big fight for the international community. But I'm surprised at the policy from Security Council, even the United Nations, now

looking to force, while Latin American governments, officially, all the ambassadors for Latin America who speak privately, they say they recognize that President Aristide is part of the problem, is not the solution. Why we're playing with two different cards and pushing the United Nations to another big problem, another Somalia here in the Caribbean?

**KITTANI:** Well, this is -- as you know from my function, this is not my area. But I never say I don't know, or no comment. That's one phrase I hate. I think what you have now is you have a resolution by the Security Council authorizing a certain number of countries to take certain action to restore democracy and to do this in Haiti. There is extensive discussion between the Secretariat and the United States and other countries involved about what they have come to call Phase I and Phase II, should things develop to make Phase I, as I understand it, the military intervention to restore President Aristide and the legal government. Now, whether the problem will be solved peacefully or if there has to be a resort to arms remains to be seen. Anyone who is in this house again would hope that it can be done without, that the legitimate government and the President could be restored without bloodshed.

**SVARZMAN:** But maybe you can -- I don't know if you can -- explain more clearly why one thing is said in public, or the solution say is one thing, and when you speak with the people in the corridors they recognize they are wrong?

**KITTANI:** Isn't that par for the course? Is there something new on that? Sorry, I'm the last one to be cynical, but....

**LEWIS:** You have broad responsibility for Africa south of the equator. I wonder sort of how great you feel the danger is that what we've seen in Rwanda could spread now to Burundi and even to Zaire, both countries seeming to be very close to the point of collapse.

**KITTANI:** Well, I think what our friend Michael Littlejohns was saying in the introduction, namely that we see more and more of these internal and external things, and you've put your finger on one of the areas where this possible implosion of more countries in a group could certainly spread. And this is very much in the mind of the Secretary-General. As a matter of fact, just this morning we were discussing with him a possible regional approach to the humanitarian and other aspects. In other words, you know the ramifications of Rwanda, and you have refugees now in Tanzania, you have refugees in Burundi, you have refugees in Zaire in large number, you have the problem of the armed soldiers of the former government in the thousands in Goma and other areas: the question is whether there may be an attempt to send a mission to assess precisely whether a regional approach, well coordinated by all the UN agencies and the

NGOs and bilateral donors -- because there is a great deal to be said about the lack of coordination among all these four or five actors -- whether you could have a scheme where you could at least prevent the situation from deteriorating, or, as you said, spreading.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** This is World Chronicle. Our guest is Ismat Kittani, Special Advisor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Mr. Kittani, you come from the Middle East, and it looks at last as if there might be a light at the end of the tunnel, as they say. What's your assessment of the situation there?

**KITTANI:** I think you're right. I think it has been very clear for at least a year now that both in South Africa and in the Middle East, as we were saying at the beginning of this programme, the trend toward solving and putting the past behind us is irreversible. Now, there will be bumps, there will be difficulties, there will be problems, and people will get killed. But in my humble opinion, I think the trend and the movement is not only irreversible, but is going to go at a speed that will surprise a lot of people. That in a matter of a year or two or three, the political, economic, social map in the Middle East will be completely transformed for the better.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** You're not worried about the reservations on both sides? Both on the Arab side and the hard line people in Israel?

**KITTANI:** Those are the bumps I was talking about. I said that it would be a bumpy road. I mean, it's not paved.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** But the bumps won't be enough to stop it?

**KITTANI:** No, no.

**SVARZMAN:** Mr. Kittani, in your intro you said the world is moving [from] the old to the new. Is the United Nations moving [from] the old to the new? Is the Secretary-General making the necessary changes in the structure? Because people seem -- some people at least seem to be thinking in the old way, not the new way.

**KITTANI:** Well, I think it's not a question of structural change, it's a question of, first of all, intellectual leadership. And here I might bring in the Social Summit. Because the way he has been looking at it, and all of us who deal with the Social Summit, is that, well, here is an opportunity, as we approach a new century and a new millennium, to really put the past behind us, not only the fact that these problems are solved, that the cold war is no more, that countries are now threatened from within rather than from across the border. And that's precisely where the Social Summit comes in. As you know, the three themes of the Social Summit are unemployment, poverty and social integration. And these are common to all, North and South. And the Secretary-General has appealed, last Monday, for example, Monday of last week, when he opened

the prepcom for the Social Summit, he said can we make Copenhagen in March next year an occasion where the North-South divide -- see, it's the only real remnant of former confrontations here in this house -- could we put that behind us and think globally about these themes? Let me give you an example. There are now 35 million people unemployed in the OECD countries. As you were saying yourself, most of these countries have double digit unemployment. Now, if they're not going to go in and out of these crises and cyclical things, they have to be convinced by the South that their solutions are in the South indeed. Think of the already 200 million Indian middle class people who exist now, and they are coming up fast. Now, it's true, they also have 200 million, perhaps a little more, of below absolute poverty. So the lesson there is, all right, you have a market in the 200 million middle class people, but at the same time the international community has an obligation to have a target with some monitoring, with some timetable about alleviating at least the most glaring aspects of poverty. And that's one of the themes. And the three themes of course are completely connected.

**SVARZMAN:** Which takes us also to the Population Conference. It is full of controversy and the United Nations seems to be caught in the middle.

**KITTANI:** Well, that is an area.... I don't want to say no comment, but again, there the problem is not -- I think most of the objections and the things have gotten off the main track. The main track is at what level in 40 years or 50 years are you going to be -- or 70 years -- be able to stabilize world population? We have now 5.5 billion people. Is it going to be at 8 billion in 2020 or 2030? Is it going to be at 10 billion? Is it going to be at 12 billion? And each scenario has its own implications. For education, for health, for resources, for energy, for --

**SVARZMAN:** Unemployment.

**KITTANI:** -- unemployment, exactly, social integration. Of youth, for example.

**LEWIS:** It seems to me that the Social Summit is just going to become another UN talking shop, another UN hot air machine. Because nobody has a solution for poverty or unemployment. If there was a nice solution that we could all agree on, fine. But in fact, nobody's got one. But it's not like the Rio Earth Summit of two years ago, because then there were concrete results, and governments actually negotiated two treaties, on biodiversity and climate change, and they've signed those treaties and the treaties are coming into effect. But there's no such thing as a treaty abolishing unemployment; you can't do it.

**KITTANI:** Well, first of all, as you know, I worked very hard with Maurice Strong in the Rio Summit. I think those two treaties were negotiated before Rio and they were signed in Rio. And Agenda 21, as you know, Paul, more than most people,

concerns a comprehensive agenda for the world in the area of the environment and development, so it's more than that. And I agree with you, it's not the same kind of theme and constituency and money and greens and media, I'm sorry, behind the Social Summit that there was. And of course, with all due respect to myself and my colleagues, we also don't have another Maurice Strong. But be that as it may. The point here is that this is different. This is an occasion I would put two things above everything else. If we achieve them in Copenhagen I'll call it a success. First, if we begin a new dialogue of globalizing our agendas instead of regionalizing, or sectoralizing it, and since the tradition of UNCTAD I, repeating what we have been saying about economic, social development. And the second is modest commitments at the highest level for two or three things. Let me give you one or two or three examples. First, as I said, absolute poverty. Primary education. Primary health. Some concretization of this, some commitment to work towards their elimination, and some monitoring, credible monitoring thing. Take another thing, structural adjustment conditionality of the Bank and the Fund, for example. I think there, the Monetary Fund --

**LITTLEJOHNS:** The World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, where they hand out money to the developing countries.

**KITTANI:** And then but they demand that they have social adjustments. They should not impact primarily on the poor and the unemployed and the.... The first thing to be cut should not be bread subsidies, it should be arms and the army and things like that. These things cannot.... But the main thing is to elevate the debate in this area of social and economic to a globalization, because otherwise we're not going to even be able to define the new order that you were searching for, Michael, at the beginning of this programme.

**LEWIS:** Do you really think that you're going to be able to persuade governments to spend less on arms, or industrial countries to give more aid and things like that? We've been trying to do this for decades.

**KITTANI:** Well, I don't know what we can expect and what we can do, but certainly we can try, and we can try to persuade both the North and the South that this conference is different. It's not the question of the South coming with its usual litany of demands from the North and the North's usual reluctance to meet them. Can we begin a new debate? All right, how do you get Spain to overcome its 22 per cent unemployment? In the long run. And the European Union, how can they --

**LITTLEJOHNS:** But as Paul said, the UN can't do that. I mean, you can't have a treaty against unemployment.

**KITTANI:** This is not the UN, this is --

**LITTLEJOHNS:** It's a UN conference.

**KITTANI:** This is more than 100, I hope, heads of state and government who are going to get together, and it's their representatives who are negotiating. You see, you people always say that Mr. Boutros-Ghali can simply, you know, wave a wand and solve these problems of the world. No! We can only service the negotiations, the tough negotiations, you know. All we're trying to say in using this pulpit is to appeal to them to change their mindsets and to approach these problems in the only way they can be solved to the benefit of all. This is not a South conference, it's not a North conference, it's a global conference.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** We have less than a minute left, Mr. Kittani. You mentioned Maurice Strong, who is a very dynamic personality and was a driving force at the Rio Summit on the environment. Do you think that Mr. Boutros-Ghali could be equally a driving force at the Social Summit? Come up with some ideas which the world as a whole could accept?

**KITTANI:** May I just remind you that Mr. Boutros-Ghali was the Secretary-General in Rio. Mr. Maurice Strong was the Secretary-General of the conference.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Yes, precisely. Oh, yes, that's what I meant.

**KITTANI:** Yes, but I mean, the Secretary-General does not only have the Social Summit to worry about, as you know.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** No, but I mean, he can come up with ideas, which --

**KITTANI:** Well, he certainly is, and I referred to some of them. In his speeches and in his articles and in his talks with every head of state, he emphasizes what I have been saying here, the importance of the Summit for all mankind, for humankind.

**LITTLEJOHNS:** Mr. Kittani, that's all the time we have. Thank you for being with us on this edition of World Chronicle. Our guest has been Ismat Kittani, Special Advisor to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. He was interviewed by Paul Lewis of *The New York Times* and Norberto Svarzman of Televisa. I'm Michael Littlejohns. Thank you for joining us. We invite you to be with us for the next edition of World Chronicle.

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